

The Throne Hospital: a short history

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The Throne Hospital was established due to the generosity of the Martin family of Shrigley, Killyleagh, whose wealth was derived from the Shrigley flax spinning mills. Mr Samuel Martin conceived the idea of establishing a Children's Hospital in a rural district close to the City of Belfast. Sadly he died in 1872, but his philanthropic wishes were honoured and carried out by his father John Martin who survived him. Twenty-eight acres of land entitled "The Throne Lands" were purchased and a Children's Hospital with 32 beds erected at a cost of £4,000 to the designs of the architect Mr T Hevey. The site was considered an ideal one situated on the lower escarpment of Cavehill, and commanding an uninterrupted view of Belfast Lough, the County Down coast and the Crumlin Hills. The hospital first opened its doors to patients on October 1, 1874 and was subsequently transferred by Mr John Martin in 1875 to be incorporated within the Belfast Royal Hospital with a stipulation that a convalescent home should be built on the Lands within 2 years of the transfer.

In the first Annual Report of the Throne Children's Hospital for the year ending 31 August 1876,¹ it is recorded that 121 patients were admitted of whom 44 were deemed cured, 41 relieved, 29 incurable, 4 died and 3 discharged for bad conduct. The list of diseases in the cases admitted included hip disease (26), spinal disease (20), paralysis (6), scrophula (9) and rickets (5) with an average stay of 177.14 days. The detailed accounts of this report also include expenditure on:

| | | £ | s | d |
|---------------------------|------|----|----|----|
| Bread 5,568 pounds | cost | 38 | 7 | 5½ |
| Milk 1,550 gallons | cost | 75 | 0 | 3 |
| Brandy 1½ gallons | cost | 1 | 16 | 0 |
| Chloroform | | 0 | 3 | 8 |
| Bandage Calico | | 4 | 8 | 3 |
| Splints, spinal apparatus | | 28 | 15 | 8 |

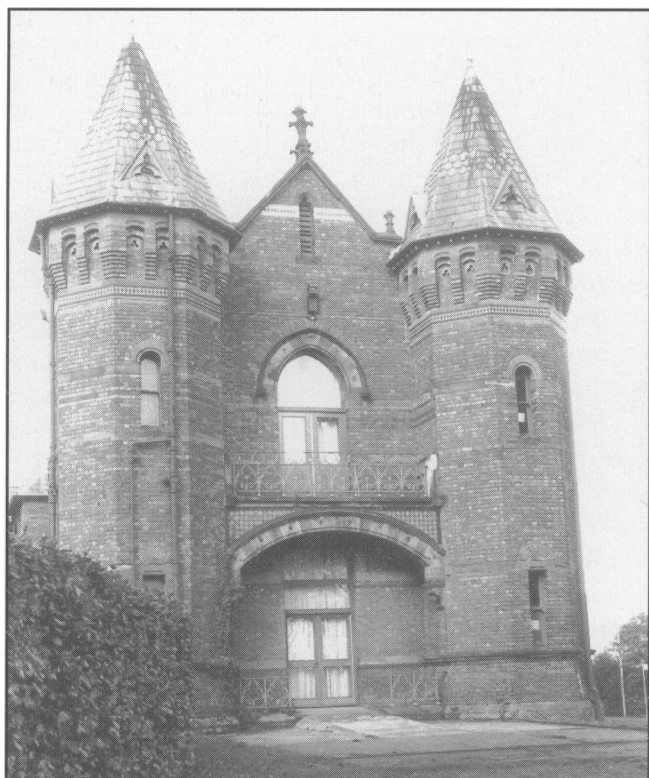
Whether the consumption of brandy and discharge for bad conduct were related is not, however, recorded! The annual staff costs listed included the £50 salary of the matron and nurses wages of £42.

The Hospital was then extended by the Board of Management of the Belfast Royal Hospital to incorporate a convalescent home at an additional cost of £7,000² for which the memorial stone was laid on Thursday, October 18 1877. The Morning News³ the following day described the ceremony at length. *"Yesterday the very interesting ceremony of laying the Memorial Stone of the Convalescent Home, Throne Lands was performed by Sir Richard Wallace, Bart., M.P., in the presence of a large assemblage, which included a numerous proportion of ladies. A train which started from Belfast shortly before 12 o'clock brought the greater number of visitors to Greencastle, whence they enjoyed a very pleasant walk to the Home which is about a mile distance from the station. The morning, though at first murky, cleared up about noon, but remained in a favourable state only for a short time. Just at the hour appointed for the performance of the ceremony—1 o'clock—a drizzling rain descended, and detracted a little from the enjoyableness of the occasion, the speeches being delivered in the open air, immediately in front of the main entrance, where the stone was laid . . . The building which is in the Gothic style of architecture is elegantly and tastefully designed . . . The dressings are of white sandstone from the Scrabo Quarries, County Down. The building is divided into 2 departments – that situated on the right being devoted to the Children's Home, and that on the left to the Convalescent Home. The former branch is designed for 32 children, and the latter for upwards of 30 patients. A spacious corridor 240 feet in length, extends from one end of the block to the other. This corridor is 10 feet in width with a ceiling of about 18 feet in height. At the end of this corridor is a beautiful stained glass memorial window, (actually a pair of windows Ed.) erected by the late John Martin, Esq., to the memory of his son Samuel Martin,*

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Esq., who died during the progress of the erection of the building. The inscription is taken from the 18th chapter of Luke and 16th verse – “Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God.” The contractors for the building were Messrs. H. and J. Martin.



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The article then outlined the address of Sir Richard Wallace who stated that the Throne was the first Convalescent Home to be erected in Ireland and that it would enable the Royal Hospital (then based at Frederick Street) to receive more patients, to ensure a complete recovery of the convalescent patients admitted to the Throne Hospital and to send them back full of health, and he hoped gratitude, to their different homes and avocations.

After a prolonged series of speeches the proceedings terminated. The company were entertained at luncheon in one of the rooms of the hospital and a programme of music was performed by the Band of the 91st Regiment including *L'Italiana in Algieri* (Rossini), *Il Trovatore* (Verdi) and *Come Back to Erin!*

Thus with not a little pomp and ceremony the Throne Hospital was opened. The role of the Throne Hospital slowly evolved with the

introduction of Plastic Surgery, Maxillo-Facial Surgery and the Dental Technician Laboratory in 1963.

In 1973 it began its last role, as a Hospital for the care of elderly patients. The Throne Hospital provided long term and rehabilitation care primarily for the 20,000 elderly population aged 65 and over residing in North and West Belfast. Patients were admitted under the care of Dr Tom Ryan until his retirement in 1982, Dr Ian Taylor from 1982-1985 and subsequently Dr Timothy Beringer from 1985 until its closure on 4 November 1992. The number of beds slowly declined (to reduce overcrowding in the smaller wards), to a total of 33 upstairs and 26 on the ground floor. The old Theatre Block was adapted to provide facilities for occupational therapy and physiotherapy. The majority of patients were admitted directly from home. In 1984 there were 102 admissions, with 64 discharges and 34 deaths. Over 75% of the patients received long-term continuing care.

On the closure of the Hospital on 4 November 1992 the remaining long-term care patients were transferred to long-term hospital care in the Royal Victoria Hospital geriatric medical unit or to nursing home care. The beautiful pair of stained glass windows were removed from the hospital for safe keeping and are currently in Whitehouse Presbyterian Church. Although the Throne Hospital was listed in 1987 as a building of special architectural and historical interest sadly it has fallen into disrepair. The adjoining lands are now developed with private housing.

REFERENCES

1. The Throne Children's Hospital Belfast in connection with the Belfast Royal Hospital. The First Annual Report, 1876.
2. Irish Times, Saturday, December 30, 1911.
3. The Morning News, Friday, October 19, 1877.